

Charles Eckhert #89
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Q: Mr. Eckhert, why don't you tell me, first of all, if you would, about the daily routine, and your duties just prior to December 7th 1941.

A: Well my duty was to see that planes were available for flying, physically, and mechanically from the area of operations.

Q: What was your position with the 11th Bomb Group?

A: Well, with the 11th Bomb Group, I was an S-4 and I was also attached to the 18th Bomb Wing as S-4; dual position.

Q: I see. What were you doing on December 6th?

A: On December 6th, I had just returned from Kauai where we were establishing a bombing range out to sea; anchored targets. I came back for the purpose of visiting and watching the Shrine football game. However, as we came into Hickam Field, General Rudolph requested that I come and see him in his office, at which time he told me that he received a message from Washington, that we should prepare for defense against attack by sabotage. And that meant that all our planes which were in dispersed areas had to be taxied in to tight formation positions along in the hangar area where could be guarded by the men against attack. This was done.

Q: About how many planes all told did that involve for you?

A: Off hand I don't remember. That's going back 40 some odd years.

Q: What types of planes?

A: We had some B-18's mainly, a couple of B-17's, and some odds and ends.

Q: What kind of a plane was a B-18?

A: A B-18 was a converted DC-3 I believe it was, into a medium bomber.

Q: Was it generally a satisfactory sort of airplane?

A: No, I wouldn't say it was. It wasn't built to carry a heavy load of bombs or a big load of gas; accomplish long missions.

Q: What were you doing on the morning of December 7th?

A: I was out waiting for Ted Truman to begin.... Ted Landon, [Major]Truman [H.] Landon, to bring in a flight of B-17's from the West

Coast. As they approached the field off Diamond Head, they were intercepted by Japanese planes and they did manage to make their way to Hickam Field and other places around the Island where the flight scattered and found landing places.

Q: Where were you waiting for Major Landon?

A: At the headquarters building at the tower.

Q: When did you first notice that something out of the ordinary was happening? What first attracted your attention?

A: Well, the approach of these planes which was out of the ordinary for a Sunday morning and we were just dumb-founded. What are those clowns doing up there! The Navy playing around?... we all thought, you know. And pretty soon you could see the firing started and some machine gun fire, dropped the dive bombers, hitting the ships in Pearl Harbor. They attacked at Hickam Field, and they did a lot of damage there. Found out the barracks for the enlisted men, found out the fire house, and they did drop some bombs on our baseball diamond. That was due to the fact that under the original plans at Hickam Field, the gasoline tanks were to be buried under the baseball diamond. The plans were changed but the Japs knew about that original plan.

Q: When did you first realize that it was a Japanese attack and not Navy planes?

A: Well, as soon as the action started.

Q: I see. Did you see them bombing... actually dropping bombs on the hangars and...

A: Yeah...you know, when something happens like that, it's all split second. You don't have any second thoughts and you just do what you can, and there wasn't much you could do with the start. But our men did get into action, those that got out of the burning barracks, and we did receive a supply of machine guns, which were set up by the men. And when the second attack came along, we were pretty well prepared to fire on them at that time.

Q: Did they manage to shoot any of them down?

A: No, there was one shot down at the far end of our field at Fort Kamehameha. That's the only one that hit the air field.

Q: I see. What did you do during the attack?

A: During the attack, I got myself a pad and a pencil and started checking over the planes to see what damage had been done to them; that was after the first attack. Then they came right back again shortly after and I made a record of all the damage done to all the planes, and immediately picked up crews to do whatever repairs was necessary to get whatever planes we could

ready for flight.

Q: I see. Of the 11th Bomb Group planes that you worked on, about how many were you able to get ready for flight?

A: Well, I couldn't tell you off hand right now. I made it as a matter of record but it's my memory going back 40 years, you know, 45 years, its...

Q: Did any of them actually manage to take off that day?

A: We got one or two off the ground.

Q: Do you recall what their missions were?

A: Well they were to search the area, particularly for submarines.

Q: Did they send back any reports?

A: None that were worth any value.

Q: You know, while you saw all of this unfolding in front of you, what were your feelings at the time? or your thoughts?

A: (laughter) It's unexplainable.

Q: Uh huh.

A: We were too damn busy to stop to think.

Q: I see.

A: You just run here and run there, and somebody would call you here, how about this, how about that, and what'll we do, you know.... things like that.

Q: Sounds like it was...

A: Hectic!

Q: pretty hectic.

A: It was hectic.

Q: Yeah. What's your single most vivid memory of the December 7th attack? If there's any one thing that's engraved in your mind, uh....

A: Well, that's another hard question. There were so many things happening and so many different things. I saw a fellow waking under shock holding his stomach... open, and holding his stomach like that.

Q: My goodness.

A: You saw everything happen that day. The headquarters squadron, 11th Bomb Group had 211 some odd men killed or wounded. This is the headquarters squadron.

Q: Gee, how come so many men from just the one squadron?

A: Well, it just so happened they were available and got to it.

Q: Well, do you have anything to add that you think might be of interest to...

A: Well, that's about the whole thing as it wound up.

Q: Well then I thank you.

A: You're welcome.